

# Chapter 43

The protagonist enters the throne room for her final trial, clad in tattered and soiled clothing, yet maintaining her dignity. The faeries, including masked observers, watch her in unusual silence, some performing a solemn gesture reserved for the honored dead. The weight of their world rests on her shoulders, as Rhys had previously stated, but their expressions suggest more than mere concern. The protagonist steels herself and strides toward Amarantha, the cruel queen, who taunts her with the proximity of her potential failure. The lack of mockery from the crowd is striking, hinting at a shift in their allegiance or respect.

Amarantha's taunts are met with defiance as the protagonist declares her love for Tamlin, despite his stony silence. Her emotional confession—voiced even in the face of death—highlights her resilience and humanity. The queen's cruel response about her impending demise is met with continued silence from the crowd, a small but significant gift that fuels the protagonist's courage. She clings to the tattoo on her arm, a symbol of her strength, determined not to die alone or defeated, even as Amarantha hints at an unsolved riddle.

The queen unveils the final trial: the protagonist must stab three innocent, hooded faeries with ash daggers to secure her survival and Prythian's freedom. The moral dilemma is stark—refuse and die, or commit cold-blooded murder to save countless others. The polished wooden daggers gleam ominously, a cruel twist on her past actions. Amarantha frames it as a "gift," mocking her history with faerie killings. The protagonist is horrified, grappling with the weight of damning her soul for the greater good, yet she silently recites the names of those who depend on her.

Steeling herself, the protagonist steps forward to take the first dagger, her fingers trembling but resolved. She rationalizes the sacrifice as necessary for Prythian's liberation, even as the horror of the act threatens to consume her. The chapter ends

on a cliffhanger, leaving her poised to make an impossible choice—one that will define her legacy and the fate of the world. The tension is palpable, underscoring the brutal cost of resistance and the blurred lines between heroism and moral compromise.

